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ABSTRACT

This guide describes eight skills every teacher should learn that were derived from a study of 252 schools in 30 states, American territories and protectorates, and 14 foreign countries over a 16-year period (1980-1996). Interviews were conducted with 749 teachers, 253 administrators, and 23 other school personnel. The skills include: (1) the ability to teach expectations; (2) the ability to get and keep students on task; (3) the ability to maintain a high rate of positive teacher-to-pupil interactions (including ensuring positive interactions with students who have developmental delays); (4) the ability to respond noncoercively to inappropriate behavior that is consequential; (5) the ability to maintain a high rate of risk-free student response opportunities; (6) the ability to serve problem-behavior students in the primary learning environment; (7) the ability to avoid being trapped into responses (criticism, sarcasm, threats, questioning, logic, arguing, force, and despair); and (8) the ability to manage behavior "scientifically." Along with the description of each skill is an explanation of why teachers need to learn the specific skill and a discussion of supporting research findings and observations. (CR)

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Utah State University

January 1997

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Behind the Schoolhouse Door

Eight Skills Every Teacher Should Have[1]

Glenn Latham
Utah State University
January 1997

The story is told of a boy who was seen searching frantically for a coin he had lost. It was dark. The boy was down on his hands and knees beneath the corner street light looking for his coin. He was very intent. A man happened by and asked the boy what he was looking for. It went like this:

Boy: "I dropped a coin and I'm trying to find it."
Man: "Where did you drop the coin?"
Boy: "Oh, I dropped it over there," as he pointed to a spot well beyond the area illuminated by the street light.
Man: "If you dropped the coin over there, why are you looking for it over here?"
Boy: "Because it's lighter over here."

Like that little boy, the education decision makers of America, over the centuries, have spent their time and energies — wasted their time and energies — looking in all the wrong places for the answers to education's most compelling and perplexing problems. Rather than looking for answers where the problems are, that is, in the classroom where education takes place, they have been looking elsewhere. In fact, they have been looking almost *everywhere* else. With what effect? Nothing of substance has changed. That is, the process of teaching children has not changed nor improved systemically in any measurable way. This is a centuries-old dilemma with which education has just never come to grips. In 1632, John Amos Comenius, the father of modern day group instruction, in his book *The Great Didactic* noted, "For more than a hundred years much complaint has been made of the unmethodological way in which schools are conducted but it is only within the last 30 that any serious attempt has been made to find a remedy for this state of things. And with what results? Schools remain exactly as they were."

In 1993, Dr. David Brite, President of the Children's Television Network, noted, "Schools today are one of the few places in our society that our grandparents would easily recognize" (Brite, 1993). Modern day educational researchers have

[1] A partial and preliminary research report, prepared for presentation to the Advisory Committee and Staff of the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center, Denver, Colorado, October 15, 1996.

come to the same conclusion noting that, "Teaching patterns [have remained] unchanged over the past century (Needels and Gage, 1991, p.7)."

Having experienced what works, and knowing what the data say about effective instruction, I began in 1980 to visit schools and classrooms across the United States and throughout the world to observe what actually happens in classrooms between teachers and learners, and to ask educators what can be done to improve teachers' ability to function successfully in the classroom. The study took me into 252 schools in all 50 states, all American Territories and Protectorates, and 14 foreign countries. Interviews were conducted with 769 teachers, 253 administrators, and 23 "other" school personnel, primarily school counselors and psychologists. Observational data were taken in 303 classrooms, of which 134 were in elementary schools, 69 were in middle/jr. high schools, 51 were in high schools, and 49 were "others," including alternative schools, private schools, special schools, and residential schools. Geographically, 97 schools were located in rural and remote areas, 128 were urban/suburban schools, and 27 were inner city schools. Eighty-eight percent of the schools were selected at random. Visits to schools in foreign countries were typically not randomly selected since there were often governmental regulations prohibiting spontaneous visits to schools. Also language barriers made it necessary that arrangements be made in advance.

These visits were conducted over a 16 year period (1980–1996), with results ranging from delightful to distressing.

The findings which produced the greatest delight were that, universally, teachers are remarkable people who are extremely concerned for the education and general well-being of their students, and who want to do a good job serving their students. From these interviews and visits came touching accounts of teachers who labored under immense personal, economic, political, and organizational/administrative constraints to serve the children in their classes.

Among the most distressing findings were the frustrations and even anger teachers expressed for how poorly they were trained at the university college of education level to teach and to manage student behavior. When I asked teachers to rate the adequacy of their college of education teacher training programs in preparing them for their work in the classroom, as shown in Figure 1, the average rating of all responses (on a

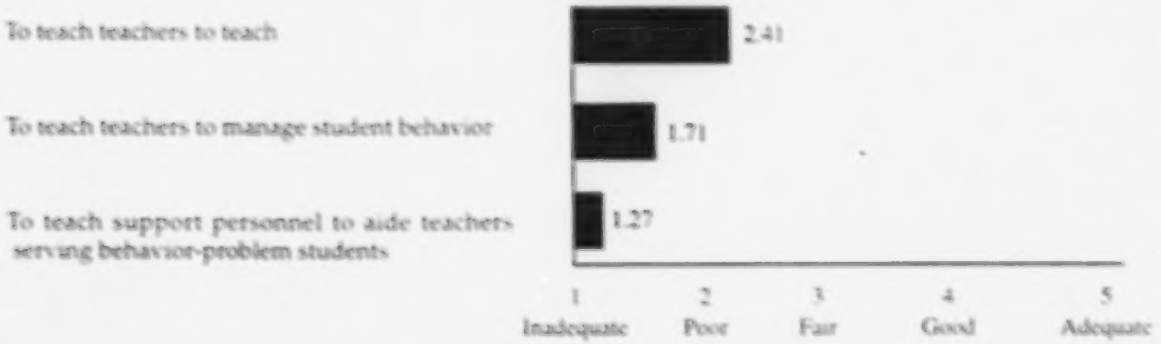

Figure 1. Teachers' ratings of the adequacy of preservice personnel preparation programs.

five point scale, 1 being inadequate to 5 being adequate) was 2.41. When asked to rate the adequacy of their training in preparing them to manage student behavior, using the same scale, the average of all responses was 1.71. When asked to rate the quality of the support services available to them through school psychology and counseling programs in working with teachers serving behavior-problem students (again, using the same 5-point scale), the average response was 1.27. It is no surprise to any knowledgable person in education that college of education teacher training programs are simply not — as a rule — doing an adequate job preparing teachers for the work that lies ahead of them in the classroom (Rigden, 1996, p. 64).

It seems doubly tragic that even though we know what works for both instruction and the management of student behavior, what is known is not being universally taught in our college of education teacher training programs. Occasionally, when I came upon classes where splendid things were happening and teachers were being remarkably effective, by the teachers' own admission, the skills they possessed which accounted for their remarkable success were rarely if ever linked to anything they had learned in their college of education teacher training programs. They noted to me time and time and time again, had it not been for their practicum experiences and student teaching opportunities (which were rarely long enough), their preservice training programs would have been "a total waste."

One particular instance, by way of example, comes to mind. Through random selection, I found myself in the class of a teacher who a short time before had been honored as the outstanding teacher of the year for her state. As I sat in the back of her classroom taking data, I began to realize that it was no wonder why this woman had been selected as the outstanding teacher of the year. She was doing everything right.

After the class period ended, we went to the faculty room where we sat at a round table to discuss my observations. I said to her, "Well, it is no wonder to me why you have been chosen as this state's teacher of the year. You did everything right." She answered with some surprise, "Oh, what did I do that was so right?" I then spread the data on the table before her and pointed out what she had done that was so not-worthy, and which accounted for her success. With each data point, her eyes got larger and larger until at last she exclaimed with excitement, "Did I do all of that?" I assured her she had and asked where she had learned to do those things. She answered, "I don't know. I guess I just learned through trial and error." She was fascinated at the data, and asked me if I would send her some materials that related to our discussion — which I did. A few weeks later, I received a lovely letter in which she said, "I have learned more during the two hours of our visit and from the material you sent me about how to create an effective learning environment than I learned in college all the way through to a masters degree." Though I was delighted that she had learned so much from our brief visit and what I had sent, I thought how tragic it was that through seven years of college she had been taught so little about teaching and classroom management.

Unlike medicine and dentistry, in which the transition from school to practice is relatively smooth and seamless, the transition from the college class to the school classroom is abrupt, traumatic, and confusing. What is covered in teachers' preservice training programs typically bears such little resemblance to what actually happens in classrooms that new teachers are left almost entirely to their own devices in knowing what to do next, "...totally unprepared for the impact of teaching itself" (Rigden, 1996). Left to their own devices, they quickly turn to other teachers for help, learn through trial and error, and muddle

Table 1
Approaches to Problem Solving

Other Professions	By Educators
Engineers Refer to laws, principles, formulas related to force, stress, motion, pressure, etc.	"It seemed at the moment to be a good way to handle the situation." "I've used it before and it's worked well." "It was suggested to me by a fellow teacher/a supervisor/a professor/the principal." "That's the way the teacher's manual said to do it." "I was taught to do it that way at the University." "I don't really know. I never though much about it." "I just fly by the seat of my pants."
Physicians Refer to their knowledge to physiology, anatomy, microbiology, chemistry, the central nervous system, the flow and circulation of body fluids, etc.	
Lawyers Refer to constitutional law, statutes, precedent, logic, courtroom procedures and knowledge of the judicial system, etc.	

their way through doing the best they can until they learn what works and how to survive.

This struggle to survive prompted me to look at how members of other professions approach the solving of problems common to their professions. I randomly selected 20 engineers, 20 physicians, 20 lawyers, and 20 educators and asked them to describe for me a problem commonly experienced in their work. I then asked them how they set about solving that problem, including what it was that formed the basis for their solution. I also asked them if other members of their profession would approach a similar problem in a similar way. Table 1 summarizes the responses to those interviews. You will notice that engineers referred to laws, principles, formulas related to force, stress, motion, pressure etc. Physicians referred to their knowledge of physiology, anatomy, microbiology, chemistry, the central nervous system, the flow and circulation of body fluids, etc. Lawyers referred to constitutional law, statutes, precedent, logic, courtroom procedures, and their knowledge of the judicial system, etc. Teachers' responses made absolutely no references to any kind of science, any body of professional literature, any principles or laws to explain what they did. Rather, they said things like, "It seemed at the moment a be good way to handle the situation," "I've used it before and it's worked well," "It was suggested to me by a fellow teacher," "That is the way the teachers manual said to do it," "I was taught to do it that way at the university," "I don't really know. I never thought much about it." The most frequently given response was, "I just fly by the seat of my pants." Surely, as a profession, we can do better than this. Surely, we can do a better job, a more professional job, in preparing teachers to assume the heavy responsibilities they face in the classroom at any level.

From a practitioner point of view, teaching is an art form. When I asked principals and teachers "Is teaching an art or a science," the overwhelming response — nearly 100% — regarded teaching as an art; aided, at best, by science. Only two teachers and one principal responded that effective teaching was dependent on a sound knowledge of the science of instruction and human behavior. This is astounding!

In this regard, while questioning principals about their roles as instructional leaders (a role very few principals related to!), I asked, "When you visit a classroom what do you see that tells you whether you have an effective or an ineffective teacher?" One elementary school principal answered (and she was serious), "I know I have a good teacher who, when she screams at the kids, can be heard for a mile and a half!" Though this is an extreme example, it nevertheless points to a serous problem in education; that is, teacher effectiveness is measured in terms of personal characteristics not professional skills. An analysis of principals' responses to the above question, as shown in Figure 2, reveals that 81% of those responses related to personal characteristics (e.g., dress, grooming, demeanor), 13% were related to experience (e.g., years teaching, degrees held, variety of teaching assignments), and only 6% were related to skills.

From my observations and interviews in schools over the past 16 years, I have identified eight skills every teacher should have as they relate, particularly though not exclusively[2], to effectively managing the learning environment. Teachers who possess these skills are better able to create and maintain the kind of learning environment in which children both learn what they need to learn, and enjoy doing it. These skills are:

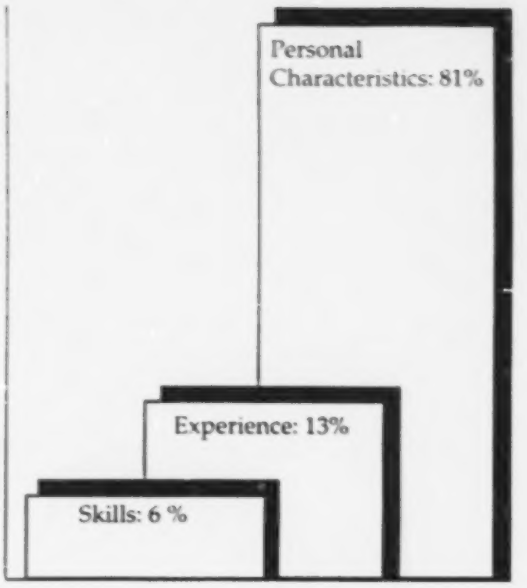

Figure 2. Principals' assessments of what is descriptive of "effective" teachers.

Skill #1: The ability to teach expectations

In classrooms where teachers' expectations are reasonable and clearly understood, the behavior of students tends to be appropriate. From my observations, I have concluded that children must know exactly what is expected of them, and what the consequences are of meeting or failing to meet, those expectations. For expectations to serve the roles for which they are intended, I have observed six conditions that must be met, as follows:

A. *Expectations should be taught "situationally."* This means that children should be taught what is expected of them in the variety of situations and settings in which they find themselves. For example, John Reed (1993) of the Oregon Social Learning Center found that when students are taught exactly what is expected of them relative to their behavior while entering school and before class instruction begins, when going to the cafeteria and during lunch, and when exiting school, referral problems for inappropriate behavior were reduced by 40%. This means, simply, that not

[2] It is not reasonable to suppose that classroom-based instruction and the management of student behavior are separate and distinct as far as the establishment and maintenance of an effective learning environment is concerned. Like love and marriage, "You can't have one with out the other."

only are students taught what is expected of them, they are taught what is expected of them in the variety of situations and settings encompassed within the school day.

B. *Expectations should be taught in a very formal manner using role-playing, modeling, and practice.* Certainly, such instruction must be presented in an age-appropriate way. But no matter what their age, students need to be taught in a direct and formal way exactly what is expected of them, and in a manner that makes it possible for the teacher to know, by what the students say and do, that they understand those expectations perfectly.

C. *Expectations should be kept to a maximum of 4 or 5.* It is important that expectations be kept to a small enough number so that everyone, including the students and staff, can remember them. Long lists of expectations are counterproductive.

D. *Expectations should be stated in instructive rather than prohibitive language.* For example, rather than "Don't shout," the expectation would be "Speak quietly." When stating expectations, it is important for teachers to tell students what they are expected to do rather what they are expected not to do.

E. *Expectations should be emphasized over rules.* Though this is a subtle matter, it nevertheless reinforces an important point about classroom management; that is, the emphasis should be on positive things rather than negative, prohibitive things (Foxx, 1996, p. 226–227).

F. *Expectations should be respected by the teachers.* It is not at all unusual for teachers to violate their own expectations. For example, an expectation might be that students are to raise their hands to be called on to speak. However, during a class discussion, a student blurts out an answer without raising his/her hand, and the teacher attends to that student by saying something like, "Right. That's a good answer. Thanks." True, the child might have given the right answer, but if in giving the answer, the child has violated the teacher's classroom expectation and has been rewarded for it by teacher attention, the probability is high that the teacher's expectations will not be respected by the students.

Skill #2: The ability to get and keep students on task

I have observed that a key to on-task behavior is to quickly engage students in the learning activity. I have found that the sooner teachers get students on task, the easier it is to keep them on task and the easier it is to get them back on task should they get off task. In classrooms where more than even a minute elapses from the time instruction is to begin and instruction actually does begin — during which time students get involved in a lot of distracting behaviors — it becomes increasingly difficult for the teacher to bring order to the classroom environment and to get instruction started. It is important, therefore, to begin instruction immediately.

Secondly, to assure a high rate of on-task behavior, the teacher should engage in what Geoff Colvin (May 27, 1996) calls "active supervision." "Active supervision" finds teachers (1) moving around the class and being close to students, (2) looking around, and (3) interacting with students. This is absolutely consistent with what I have observed in classrooms all across the globe. In classrooms where teachers are up and around and physically close to students and interacting with them, students tend to be on task and productive. It worries me when I'm in classrooms where teachers give students assignments, then take their seats at their desks, not to stand up until the class period is over.

Managing by walking around is a powerful antidote to inappropriate student behavior. Re-

garding proximity, I have found that there is a direct relationship between how close a teacher is to students and how well students behave: the closer the proximity the better the behavior.

I was recently in a classroom for behaviorally disordered students. There were 12 students in the class. During the hour I observed, there was not one incident of inappropriate student behavior. After the period was over, I asked the teacher how she accounted for the fact that though she had 12 of the school's worst behaving students in her class, I didn't observe one single behavior problem, nor were the students off task during the entire class period. She answered, "I never sit down. I am constantly walking among the students and interacting with them. As you will notice, I don't even have a desk in my classroom." I was startled when I looked around to note that, indeed, she didn't even have a desk and a chair for herself.

Skill #3: The ability to maintain a high rate of positive teacher-to-pupil interactions.

A basic principle of human behavior teaches us that behavior responds better to positive than to negative consequences. Most people understand this, but despite it, there is a strong tendency on the part of classroom teachers to attempt to manage the classroom environment coercively. There remains a strong inclination among teachers, particularly — though certainly not exclusively — above the third grade, to espouse the philosophy that you must never smile 'til Christmas — at the earliest.

I recently gave a talk to a large group of school teachers and administrators on the topic of non-coercive, positive methods of classroom management. Afterward, I received an anonymous note from a high school teacher. It read in part as follows: "Dr. Latham is a fine, funny, intelligent little gentleman (I liked that part) whose policies would work if tempered with severe punishment to stop the inappropriate behavior, with behavior modification techniques used afterward. There are no rewards for not running a stoplight — there's only punishment if you do run the light. *That's reality*" (emphasis not added).

This mentality is destroying the quality of learning environments all across America, creating coercive environments from which students want to escape. As noted by Dr. Murray Sidman in his marvelous book *Coercion and It's Fallout* (1989) "Many students would leave school immediately if they had the choice." The fact of the matter is, about a million students a year do leave school, whether given the choice or not. They are called dropouts. And why do they leave? They leave because, in large measure, school environments, particularly at the upper grades, are becoming more and more coercive, a circumstance that encourages students to escape and avoid.

This sad situation exists not only in the secondary grades. Recently, a distraught woman in our community who volunteers a few days a week in a nearby first-grade class, called about her concern over all the "shouting and scolding and criticizing by teachers that goes on continually, even in kindergarten classes." The distraught parent of a second grade student called me wondering what she should do: "My son tells me every day he wants to die because his teacher is so mean to the students." A similarly distressing call came to me from the mother of a 15 year-old girl.

My data reveal that teachers allow over 90% of all of the appropriate things their students do to go unrecognized; yet, when student misbehave, teachers are 2 to 5 times more likely to pay attention to that behavior than they are to pay attention to appropriate behavior. Since teacher attention is one of the major variables that accounts for how students behave, the attention given by teachers to inappropriate behavior is typically of such a nature as to increase the probability that

the inappropriate behavior will be strengthened; i.e. it will occur again and again and again predictably.

Conditions are even worse for students who are "different." A group of researchers reported that 82% of students who are developmentally delayed never receive positive feedback from teachers even when they comply with teacher requests, and that teacher disapproval statements directed at such students outnumber approval statements by a ratio of 15 to 1 (Shores, Gunter, and Jack, 1993).

Speaking to a gathering of special educators, called by the United States Office of Special Education Programs, Katherine Larson (1994) of the Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara, reported that "many LD and SED students are afforded greater dignity when they are incarcerated in youth prisons than when enrolled in schools." Her experience in both schools and in youth detention facilities revealed that "staff in youth detention facilities are more courteous, more respectful, more compassionate, upbeat, and more friendly than educators in schools;" a circumstance she felt was "the result of a negative or adversarial relationship between students and adults in schools" (p. 8). (See Foxx, 1996, for a profound explanation of how such a thing can be.)

Dr. Sidney Bijou (1988) instructs us that "research has shown that the most effective way to reduce problem behavior in children is to strengthen desirable behavior through positive reinforcement rather than trying to weaken undesirable behavior using aversive and negative processes," (p. 444–451). This is what research has taught us, and this is what educators must learn to do. There is simply no alternative. So long as the notion prevails that "severe punishment" is the way to manage behavior, schools will continue to be coercive environments, and students will be anxious to get away from them, to perform badly within them, to strike out against them (countercoercion) and to be disinclined as adults to support them.

We know exactly how to create a positive learning environment where students behave well to enjoy the positive consequences of behaving well rather than to simply avoid the negative consequences of behaving badly (Johnson and Layng, 1991). Once teachers learn to create an environment that is free of coercion, where appropriate behavior is properly recognized, student behavior will improve, student performance will improve, and students will remain in school.

I have observed that in classrooms where the ratio of negative to positive interactions is never greater than one negative interaction to eight positive interactions, the learning environment tends to be noncoercive and student behavior tends to be appropriate. This is quite consistent with the recently reported data of Dr. Betty Hart and Dr. Todd Risley (1995) regarding their research on verbal behavior in families. Low risk homes were characterized by environments in which parents said five times more positive things to their children than they did negative things. High risk homes were homes where parents said twice as many negative things as positive things. The research is clear on this matter! Teachers have simply *got* to learn to be *much* more positive and encouraging than negative and discouraging.

The literature on positive reinforcement in classroom settings is abundantly clear on this matter (Eisenberger and Cameron, November, 1996). Our college of education teacher training programs have simply got to access that literature and teach it to students who are preparing to become teachers. Contemporary student behaviors are simply too complex to be dealt with on a trial-and-error, conventional-wisdom, back-to basics basis. It is irresponsible for our college of education teacher training programs to graduate students who have not been thoroughly

taught how to manage behavior in the classroom using scientifically sound, positive rather than coercive and aversive, methods. Ignorance is the parent of coercion. Only those who do not know a better way persist in using coercive methods to maintain — or *attempt* to maintain — order in the classroom.

When teachers skillfully acknowledge appropriate behavior using positive verbal and nonverbal interactions, dramatic things can happen. I observed such an effect while doing some work for a school district in a nearby state experiencing difficulties in retaining high-risk students in the regular education classroom. The district served a large population of high risk students, and was concerned that a disproportionate number of those students (80%, in fact) were classified early in the school year as mentally retarded, behaviorally disturbed, socially maladjusted, attention deficit hyperactivity disordered, and so on. I was asked by the school district to see what could be done to reverse this problem. After observing in classrooms for a few days, the problem became evident to me. I found that teachers and their aides were averaging 34 negative interactions during each class period, while having only 9 positive interactions. I simply taught the teachers and their aides to reverse their approach to interacting with students by properly paying attention to the things students did well, while ignoring the inconsequential, annoying things students did (98% of which could be ignored without problems arising). After training, teachers and their aides were averaging 167 positive interactions per class period and only 4 negative interactions. The result was that during the next school year, placement of students in special education dropped dramatically from 80% to 11% (Latham, 1992).

The ability to do this is a skill that is remarkably characteristic of teachers whose classrooms are generally devoid of outlandish and inappropriate student behavior, and where student achievement is high.

Skill #4: The ability to respond noncoercively to inappropriate behavior that is consequential.

Occasionally students will do things in class that are so disruptive and potentially dangerous to person and/or property, that they can't be ignored; something has to be done, now. It has been my experience that such behaviors are rare, spontaneous, and when responded to properly, are quickly over and instruction continues with only a slight interruption. The following event exemplifies such a response. It occurred in an alternative high school classroom while the students were engaged in individual seatwork. The room was quiet as the teacher circulated among the students.

Without any warning whatsoever, a student leaped to her feet and began wildly cursing another student she was accusing of "tormenting" her. As I typically do, when assessing the effects of treating such behaviors, I quickly set my stopwatch to record how long the disruptive behavior continued, given the teacher's response to it.

To my delight, the teacher retained his professional dignity beautifully. His face registered not the slightest annoyance. In complete control he approached the enraged girl and quietly said, calling her by name, "It seems that you are upset about something. Would you care to tell me about it?" All eyes were glued on these two disparate figures standing before them, one with face flushed, trembling, loud, profane, and out of control. The other serene, composed, calm, and quiet. In the presence of such a teacher, the girl, though trembling and very angry, grew slightly calmer.

"I hate this (expletive)," she said loudly, pointing to the boy in the seat beside her. "All he does is make my life miserable. He doesn't know

nothin' 'cept how to make my life miserable. I wish that (expletive) would die — right here and now. Right now! Right where he's sitting!"

Empathetically and quietly the teacher replied, "I can understand you'd be upset. No one likes to be tormented. I'm sorry this happened." In a room so quiet you could hear a pin drop the two just stood there looking at each other. The anger drained from the girl's face.

Quietly, almost pleadingly, she asked, "Mr. Porter, would you ask him to please leave me alone?" She sat down, put her head on her arms which were folded across her desk, and quietly cried.

The teacher turned to the boy and gently, softly said," I know that sometimes it's fun to provoke people and to get a rise out of them, but what is the appropriate, mature thing for a young man your age to do?"

The boy, hardly able to make eye-to-eye contact, meekly replied, "I know, Mr. Porter. I'm sorry. It won't happen again. Honest."

Mr. Porter, as he said thanks, patted the boy on the back. Turning to walk away, he gently tapped the girl's elbow. I looked at my watch. Fifty-seven seconds! It was over in 57 seconds! Furthermore, the entire class was similarly composed, as everyone returned without incident to their seatwork.

The teacher had done everything right: he was calm; he kept his voice low; he was empathetic and understanding; he stood close, yet unintimidating or threatening; he was composed; he was prepared. It has been my experience, having taken data on many, many disruptive behaviors, that when teachers respond as did Mr. Porter, 81% of such disruptions are over within 30 seconds, and 94% are over within a minute and 45 seconds (Latham, March 18, 1996). When teachers are reactive, coercive, and angry, the rage continues, escalating with every angry exchange until the learning environment has been reduced to shambles, students are being kicked out of class, and whatever instructional time is left has been destroyed.

After class, I asked Mr. Porter where he had learned to respond as he had done to such difficult, spontaneous behaviors. "In the military, "he quickly replied. "Whatever I learned about teaching and behavior, I learned in the military." "What about college?" I asked. The fire in his eyes, an epithet, and simply, "A complete waste of time. I was cheated," convinced me to pursue another line of questioning.

The ability to respond non-coercively to inappropriate behaviors that have become consequential, and which become a threat to the learning environment and those within it, is a skill teachers must learn if they hope to survive and succeed in the classrooms of today's schools.

Skill #5: The ability to maintain a high rate of risk-free student response opportunities.

I have observed that in classes where students have frequent opportunities to respond free of the risk of criticism and free of the risk of failure, student behavior problems are minimal, a circumstance cited in the literature of teaching (Heward, et. al., 1995; Winter, 1995; and Binder, 1996). It is what I call a risk-free learning environment. Classroom teachers, as well, have reported that in settings where students are "safely" involved, free of risk, academic success increases as well (Pigford, 1995).

Failure is a terrible teacher, and to use it as a teaching tool is simply irresponsible. Certainly, we all learn from our mistakes and failures, but using failure and mistakes as teaching tools should be avoided. From the research on precision teaching (Lindsley, 1992), direct instruction (Becker and Carnine, 1981), mastery learning (Bloom, 1986), and the Personalized System of

Instruction (Lloyd and Lloyd, 1992), is found an immense body of literature on how to establish and maintain an environment in which students are able to learn free of the risks of failure and criticism. It is patently irresponsible for education generally, and for teacher education programs particularly, to ignore what that literature has to teach us!

Skill #6: The ability to serve problem-behavior students in the primary learning environment (that is, the classroom).

Across the length and breadth of America, I have observed a burgeoning of programs designed to remove students from classrooms as a means of managing inappropriate behavior and of maintaining an in-control learning environment. Certainly, there are times when a student's unmanageable behavior becomes so outrageous that it destroys the quality of the learning environment for all students. In such instances, students need to be removed from the classroom. But it is my experience that had classroom teachers been taught effective, scientifically-sound behavior management strategies, the need to remove students to alternative programs (such as in-school suspension, time out, expulsion, and so on), would rarely occur. It is becoming more and more evident that such programs are functioning as little more than a quick fix for educators' lack of effective behavior management skills.

When out-of-class alternatives are needed for dealing with inappropriately behaving students, three conditions must be constantly monitored, as follows:

1. *Student's in-class behavior should steadily improve.* There needs to be solid evidence to verify that with the use of out-of-class placement options, students are taught to behave better in class. Simply taking a student out of class to provide relief for the classroom teacher is not sufficient.
2. *The need for such programs throughout the school year grows steadily less;* i.e. fewer and fewer students are being referred for out-of-class placement.
3. *Teachers' ability to manage student's behavior in the classroom steadily increases;* i.e., they become increasingly more skilled at managing the classroom environment so that the need for out-of-class placement options steadily declines.

In all of my visits to schools across America, in not one single instance have I ever been shown data (even when requested), which documented a remedial effect of out-of-class placement alternatives. Never! As is typically the case, this is another approach to shaping our educational programs in a data-free environment; an environment in which we have our feet planted squarely in midair. It is shameful, indeed.

A basic principle of human behavior teaches us that behavior is largely a product of its immediate environment. What this means for educators is that students must be taught to behave well in the primary learning environment; that is, the classroom. Taking students out of the classroom to teach them appropriate behavior, without fixing the classroom environment from which they were taken, will only find these students regressing to their previous levels of inappropriate behavior once they return to that environment. Something has to change in the classroom to make it more reinforcing for students to behave well than to behave inappropriately. It is as simple and straightforward as that!

Skill #7: The ability to avoid being trapped.

Teachers (like parents), tend to get themselves trapped when they attempt to manage the class-

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room environment using conventional wisdom, intuition, common sense, coercion, and any other mythical approach that has no hope for ultimate success. Indeed, these counterproductive measures typically get teachers trapped into a quagmire of reactive, out-of-control responding that creates a coercive environment which students want to escape and avoid (Sidman, 1988, p. 94-95).

Briefly, the following eight traps are the ones I have found during my observations in classrooms to be the most common:

1. Criticism, meaning finding fault.
2. Sarcasm, meaning to make fun of a student through ridicule.
3. Threats, meaning to warn students of some hostile act by the teacher if the student doesn't behave better — quick!
4. Questioning, meaning asking students to explain why they misbehave.
5. Logic, meaning trying to reason with students in an attempt to improve their behavior/performance.
6. Arguing, meaning trying to convince students that the teacher is right and the students are wrong.
7. Force (physical or verbal), meaning to hit, or shout at, students to make them behave.
8. Despair, meaning to portray a sense of hopelessness.

(For a more thorough treatment of these "traps," see *Keys to Classroom Management*, available from Glenn I. Latham, Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84321-9620, (801) 752-0238.)

Skill #8: The ability to manage behavior "scientifically."

As one looks historically at America's attempts to improve education, the emphasis has been on outcome findings rather than "treatment-outcome research," where the emphasis is on what *produces* outcomes (Dubois and Brook, 1988; and Wennberg, 1989). Treatment-outcome research, characteristic of pharmacology, medicine, and dentistry, for example, looks for explanations of why a treatment does or does not work.

When the emphasis is only on outcomes, the approach to remediation is to increase goals and raise standards as the means of improving those outcomes. Virtually nothing is said in education, in the broad sense, about *how* one improves outcomes except to address such broad generalizations as "improving teaching," "individualizing instruction," "making education available to all students," "decreasing dropout rates," "reducing violence," and on and on and on (Bateman; Carnine). (Both documents are undated.)

It reminds me of when I played for my high school golf team. Our golf coach was also the driving instructor. He didn't know much about how to teach driving a car, and he knew absolutely nothing about driving a golf ball. After a match we lost but should have won, he said to us, "As you prepare for your next match, you are all going to have to shave a few strokes off your game. You'll never win the next match unless you are all able to shoot consistently in the 70s or low 80s. It's going to be a tough match, so get out there and shave some strokes off your games." We all knew that, but no one asked him the embarrassing question, "What do you suggest we do to improve our ball-striking ability?" He had no suggestions before he gave us the charge to improve our games, so he stayed in comfortable territory where the light was good, sticking with high sounding goals which we all knew would improve nothing. The five members of the golf team got together and instructed one another as to how we could improve our ball-striking ability, which we did, and we won the next match. We engaged in a form of treatment-outcome research.

As with improving one's golf game, education is never going to improve until something is done to improve teachers' ability to teach! High sounding rhetoric in the form of grand, over-arching goals (such as America 2000) are absolutely not going to improve by one iota how children learn and how teachers teach! Until education's decision makers begin seriously paying attention to "treatment-outcome research" rather than outcome research only, nothing will improve (Slavin, 1996, and Biddle, 1996).

Margaret Wang and her associates (December 1993/January 1994) have reminded us of this in their insightful study entitled "Synthesis of research: What helps students learn." They noted, "An analysis of fifty years of research reveals that direct influences like classroom management affect student learning more than indirect influences such as policies" (p. 74). In their study, Dr. Wang and her associates looked at "relative influences on learning" in an effort to find out what really improves student performance (i.e., "treatment-outcomes research"). They looked at 28 variables ranging from "classroom management" to "district demographics". It was certainly not surprising to learn that the very thing that educators spend the great majority of their time addressing in their efforts to improve education — that is, crafting policies — was the next to the weakest influence of all on how well students learn. From the work of Wang and her associates and others, we can simply come to no other conclusions than that the things that politicians and education decision makers are spending all of their time on is tantamount to the boy looking for his lost coin in a place other than where it was lost. We are looking in all the wrong places. In this regard, Wang and her associates noted, "Unless reorganization and restructuring strongly affect the direct determinants of learning, they offer little hope of substantial improvement. Changing policies is unlikely to change practices in classrooms and homes where learning actually takes place."

It is tragic to realize that the educational establishment is afloat in a sea of knowledge about how to improve instruction yet refuses to drink of it. It is *altogether* safe to say that our profession has a data-base that is so robust and so broadly arrayed that we know *exactly* how to establish and maintain an effective learning environment, an environment in which all children can learn to their potential. We know how to do it, *absolutely!* But as a profession, we refuse to do it, which raises the question, "Why not?" This question was asked a few years ago by Dr. Ogden Lindsley in a provocative article entitled "Why Aren't Effective Teaching Tools Widely Adopted?" (Lindsley, 1992). In the article, Lindsley notes, "Effective educational methods are available. They have been available for a long time" (p. 1). He further observes, "The fate of highly productive educational methods in public instruction is a national shame. No highly effective educational method or program has ever been widely adopted in North America," which Dr. Lindsley characterizes as "scandalous" (p. 1).

A few years ago, as part of a study to which this work is related, I made an attempt to determine why effective methods of instruction don't get broadly and systemically adopted in America. Published under the title "The Birth and Death Cycles of Educational Innovation" (Latham, 1988), I found that changing how one teaches is just too difficult for most teachers to handle. This, coupled with the lack of any incentive to change, tends to spell doom for any method of instruction that is different, even though it promises — with near absolute certainty — to improve academic outcomes for students. In fact, as I found in another study I published under the title, "Mainstreaming: A Victim of Disincentives" (Latham, 1988), not infrequently teachers who perform particularly well, using effective meth-

ods, are the ones who find themselves teaching the most difficult students in school. Time and time again, while interviewing teachers over the past 16 years about what needs to be done to improve education in America, including how teachers teach, I was told that teachers do themselves no great favor when they become recognized as particularly effective because they soon find that the most difficult to teach and manage students become placed in their classes.

We know that the most effective approaches to instruction are those which form the foundations upon which Precision Teaching, Direct Instruction, Mastery Learning, and the Personalized System of Instruction are built. Given the database which supports these approaches to instruction, for anyone to seriously challenge their effectiveness is tantamount to spitting in the wind. So why don't we accept them and use them and serve children well with them? With frustration and anxiety ringing in his words, Dr. Lindsley summed it up this way:

> "It is hard to keep your humor when you accept the fact that you invested 25 years in developing methods that can help your nation out of the educational abyss into which it is racing. You made these methods inexpensive. You made them clear. You helped illustrate their worth. You made them attractive. Yet they are ignored or rejected because of popular myth and bigotry" (p. 26).

Therein lies the sum and substance of the answer to his compelling question "Why aren't effective teaching tools widely adopted?:" "myth and bigotry." Indeed, this is a shameful circumstance, a circumstance which can be easily and quickly remedied if education will put to work what works, and will equip teachers with the skills they need — skills that, using "treatment-outcome research" methods, have been proven to be effective.

End Note:

In time, this document will be expanded into a book preliminarily entitled *Behind the Schoolhouse Door: A Look at Education from Within*. It will report in considerable detail the data from my observations and interviews in those settings where the "coin" is lost. The book will conclude with specific suggestions about what *must* be done to reform education the way education *must* be reformed.

Despite the endless stream of education reform rhetoric that has invaded humankind's senses for centuries, education has not been, and is not being, *re*formed. It has only been, and is only being, remodeled, redecorated, and embellished.

Recently, while spending the Christmas holiday with our daughter and her family in Detroit, we visited the Henry Ford Museum. As I observed the evolution of forms of transportation, I was struck with the sharp contrast between animal-drawn forms of transportation and transportation powered by the internal combustion engine. Prior to the paradigm shift from muscle to machine, so-called advances were little more than trimmings and embellishments: a buckboard with shock absorbing springs beneath it and padded, upholstered seats; artistically arrayed features, designs, and dressings; a surrey with a fringe on top; enclosures against the weather and dust, and even wood-burning heaters. But no matter what was done to beautify and make it more functional it, it was still a horse-drawn buggy.

And so it is with education. Today, as it has been for centuries, education remains a matter of telling students what they need to know, assigning them related things to do, testing them on how much they can recall, then attaching a symbol of some sort as a measure of success or failure. In the name of reform, decorations, trimmings, and embellishments have adorned education: indi-

vidualized instruction (a term without meaning), back-to-basics (education is the only enterprise I know which is heading into the 21st Century with its eye fixed keenly on the rear view mirror!), classrooms without walls (a euphemism for an invitation to chaos), graduation requirements, teacher pay and performance requirements, compliance standards, LRE, Ebonics (just one more data-free embellishment) and on and on, not *one* of which assures an improved, adequate learning environment.

Virtually every current so-called education reform issue could become reality, and *nothing* would improve, systemically, between the teacher and the learner. As noted by Wang and her associates, and others, teacher-learner issues are given little more than a patronizing pat on the head. As a part of my study of the past 16 years, I have reviewed the minutes of boards of education meetings. Using a systematic random sampling technique, I have read the contents of every nth page of boards of education minutes. *Never once* did I find an item that dealt with what needed to be done to improve the quality of instruction within the district's classrooms. Virtually all board business addressed matters of finances, facilities and equipment, personnel, public relations, and legalities and litigation. One board of education, serving a large farming community, spent the entire board meeting in heated discussion over whether the district should purchase a Ford or Chevrolet pickup. And when what happens in classrooms is given board attention, it is typically, as noted by the International Institute for Advocacy for School Children (Bateman), a parading before the board of "smiling children draped over a dinosaur [in] saccharine prose about the wonderful, cooperative, learning efforts of Mrs. Davis' class" (p.11).

Finances are important, and must be seriously addressed. But to what ultimate end? Facilities and equipment are likewise, important. But to what ultimate end? Personnel matters are important. But to what ultimate end? Until education's attention is locked on the answer to that question, there will be no systemic improvement of what happens behind the schoolroom door.

Though framed in the language of reform, the very essence of education remains static; essentially no more than a matter of telling students what they need to know, assigning them related things to do, testing them on how much they can recall, then attaching a symbol of some sort as a measure of success or failure. The paradigm is paralyzed, and so as long as it is, like the horse and buggy, the best we can hope for is something that looks good — referred to in scientific parlance as face validity.

As with transportation's advance to the internal combustion engine, science offers education a new paradigm, one that is as dramatic as the shift from muscle to machine. It is found in the literature of education, psychology, and behavior under such headings as "fluency," "free-operant conditioning," "schedules of reinforcement," " precision teaching," "celeration," "critical learning outcomes," "learning channels" (not related to TV), "elimination of procedure-imposed ceilings," "component-composite relations," "instructional momentum," and more — much more (Binder, 1996; Lindsley, 1996; Foxx, 1996; Hofmeister and Lubke, 1990).

These terms are as foreign to the education establishment of today as was the language of physics and engineering to the makers of horse-drawn carriages and buggies. But it is the language of education's future; that is, if education hopes to have a future that is anything more than an embellished extension of its antiquated past.

More will be said on this matter in my book, "Behind the Schoolhouse Door."

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